

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

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AMEMBASSY NJEMENA

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

S E C R E T TRIPOLI 1018

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E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LY, PINS, PINT

SUBJ: THOUGHTS ON QADHAFI'S FUTURE

REF: A. TRIPOLI 0942, B. TRIPOLI 0777

SUMMARY: QADHAFI'S RECENT SETBACKS IN FOREIGN ADVANTURES
DIMINISH HIS PRESTIGE INTERNALLY AND GENERATE MORE
CRITICISM BUT POSE NO SPECIFIC IMMEDIATE THREAT TO HIS
RULE. END SUMMARY.

1. IN REF A WE SPECULATED THAT SERIES OF RECENT SETBACKS IN
ARAB WORLD MAY IMPEL QADHAFI TO EVEN MORE DESPERATE FOREIGN
ADVENTURES. OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE IS HOW AND TO WHAT EXTENT
SETBACKS BEAR ON HIS INTERNAL POSITION. IN REF B WE POINTED OUT
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THAT QADHAFI REGIME HAD EARLIER DROPPED ITS DEFENSIVE POSTURE.

AFTER MALTA TRIP AND DISPATCH OF PRIMIN JALLUD (WHOSE ABSENCE FOR ALMOST EIGHT WEEKS SEEMS TO HAVE HAD LITTLE EFFECT UPON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS) TO MIDDLE EAST QADHAFI APPEARED TO BE RUNNING LIBYA WITH CONFIDENCE AND IN AN UPBEAT MOOD. IN PUBLIC QADHAFI HAS APPEARED BRISK AND BUSY PRESIDING PERSONALLY OVER DISCUSSION OF RCC/CABINET MEETINGS GIVING IMPRESSION GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS MOVING SMARTLY AHEAD.

2. NEVERTHELESS, THE EROSION OF QADHAFI'S POSITION AS PREVIOUSLY UNCHALLENGED LEADER WHICH BEGAN LAST AUGUST MAY ACCELERATE AS A RESULT OF RECENT SERIES OF FOREIGN POLICY SETBACKS. AND CHANGED DOMESTIC BASIS OF HIS REGIME. TRIPOLI IS A VERY TENSE CITY THESE DAYS. ALL ARE AWARE THAT HE HAS INVOLVED LIBYA IN A SERIES OF EMBARRASSING AND DISASTROUS AND UNSUCCESSFUL ADVENTURES. EVERYWHERE ARE INCREASING APPREHENSIONS THAT SOME SORT OF A CHANGE MAY BE IMMINENT.

3. THIS EROSION IS ACCOMPANIED BY SOME CLEAR CHANGES IN LAR STRUCTURE. FOR EXAMPLE THE RCC IS NO LONGER A COLLEGIAL BODY AND SOURCE OF REVOLUTIONARY LEGITIMACY. IT CONSISTS OF QADHAFI AND TWO OR THREE OTHERS. SIMILARLY THE LARGER CLOAK OF THE REVOLUTION, THE FREE OFFICER UNION HAS SUFFERED GREATLY FROM ARRESTS AND DESERTIONS. QADHAFI, IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS, CLEARLY REVEALS HIS PRE-OCCUPATION WITH THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY OF HIS RULE IN WAKE DEFECTION SO MANY ERSTWHILE REVOLUTIONARY OFFICER COLLEAGUES. RECENT INTELLIGENCE REPORTS STATE QADHAFI DEPENDS INCREASINGLY ON TRIBAL RELATIVES FOR COUNSEL AND SUPPORT IN IMPLEMENTING DECISIONS. QADHAFI IS OBVIOUSLY INCREASINGLY CONCERNED OVER PERSONAL SECURITY. ON AMERICAN EVACUATION DAY, JUNE 11, FOR EXAMPLE, DIPLOMATS WERE RELIEVED OF BRIEF CASES AND BAGS BEFORE BEING ALLOWED TO ENTER THE REVIEWING STAND.

4. CRITICISM OF QADHAFI HAS BECOME MORE OPEN IN RECENT WEEKS PARTICULARLY AMONG THE MERCHANT AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY. FOR THE PRESENT, DECLINING POPULARITY IS NOT DIRECTLY RELEVANT TO SURVIVAL. IN ANY EVENT SUBSIDIZED FOOD PRICES KEEPS EVEN THE LOWER STRATA EATING ADEQUATELY. LACK OF SUPPORT BY MERCHANT AND BUSINESS GROUPS IS, OF COURSE, NOT NEW NOR IS IT A SERIOUS THREAT (THEY ARE STILL MAKING MONEY). HOWEVER WIDESPREAD
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CRITICISM AND RIDICULE RESULTING FROM FOREIGN BLUNDERS DOES AFFECT THE ATMOSPHERE.

5. MORE SERIOUS ARE REPORTS OF WIDESPREAD CRITICISM IN THE ARMED FORCES. BUT LOCAL EGYPTIAN SOURCES TELL US WIDESPREAD DISSATISFACTION IN THE MILITARY IS THUS FAR UNCOORDINATED. UNTIL LAST YEAR, ALMOST SIX YEARS AFTER SEIZING POWER, QADHAFI DID NOT HAVE TO DEAL WITH SIGNIFICANT RIVALRY FROM WITHIN

HIS CIRCLE OF MILITARY COLLEAGUES. THUS HIS SKILL IN DEALING WITH DISSIDENTS IN THE MILITARY HAVE ONLY RECENTLY BEEN TESTED. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER QADHAFI'S EFFORTS THIS PAST YEAR TO DRUM UP SUPPORT FROM RURAL TRIBAL GROUPS HAS BEEN AT EXPENSE OF CULTIVATING THOSE ARMY CIRCLES UPON WHOSE SURVIVAL

HIS REGIME WILL ULTIMATELY DEPEND.

6. QADHAFI IS SURROUNDED BY PERSONAL SECURITY GUARDS AND THERE IS OBVIOUSLY A WIDESPREAD NET OF INFORMANTS BOTH WITHIN THE MILITARY AND THE POPULATION AT LARGE. NEVERTHELESS, WE DOUBT THAT THIS COLLECTION OF TRIBAL RELATIVES HAVE THE SKILLS OF THE EGYPTIAN SECURITY GROUPS WHICH SERVED QADHAFI IN THE PAST, AND AN INCREASING NUMBER OF AGGRIEVED MILITARY PEOPLE DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR THE COLONEL'S FUTURE.

7. QADHAFI'S ARAB AND AFRICAN NEIGHBORS HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY CONCERNED OVER GROWING LIBYAN THREAT TO THEIR INTERNAL SECURITY, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE FAILURE OF QADHAFI'S SCHEME FOR UNITY WITH EGYPT IN 1973. THAT THREAT NOW APPEARS TO HAVE BECOME MORE INTER-ABLE AND URGENT TO A NUMBER OF ARAB LEADERS WHO HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO SUPPORT SERIOUS ATTEMPTS TO OVERTHROW THE LIBYAN REGIME WITH A COMBINED APPLICATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES. THERE IS INCREASING REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THEY MAY DECIDE TO EXERCISE THAT POWER.

8. OUR CONCLUSION IS THAT WHILE QADHAFI'S UPBEAT PHASE WAS SHORT HE IS STILL IN CONTROL. HE DOES, HOWEVER, FACE GROWING IF UNSPECIFIED AND UNCOORDINATED OPPOSITION INTERNALLY AND HE MUST FEAR THE POSSIBILITY THAT ONE OR MORE OF HIS HOSTILE NEIGHBORS WILL SOMEHOW TRY TO EXPLOIT THIS. THUS, QADHAFI'S FUTURE IS
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CLEARLY MORE UNCERTAIN THAN A YEAR AGO. ALTHOUGH THERE IS EVER PRESENT POSSIBILITY OF LONE, UNKNOWN ASSASSIN QADHAFI MAY BEST BE SERVED BY SEEING INABILITY DISSATISFIED LIBYANS (OR OTHER ARABS) TO FIND A POWER-SEEKING LEADER DETERMINED TO REPLACE HIM.
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